

Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XL, NUMBER 1



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
JANUARY 2017

Editor –Linda Alderman ewalderman@comcast.net

January 2017 Calendar

- Jan 10** - Tues. - 10 a.m. **Day Meeting** at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosted by: Janice Stuff.** Program: "*Winter Solstice;*" **presented by Jacqui Highton.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**
- Jan 18** - Wed. - 6:30 p.m. **Evening Meeting** at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004), **Hosted by: Lois Jean Howard and Martha Burg.** Program: "*Henna Artistry - Ephemeral Yet Enduring; Enduring Yet Ephemeral;*" **presented by Macy Ulbricht, Rose Proler & Douniazed Wong.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

February 2017 Calendar

- Feb 14** - Tues. - 10 a.m. **Day Meeting** at Brookdale Community Room, (5151 Buffalo Speedway, Houston, TX 77005). **Note Change of Location!** **Hosted by Thelma Rowe.** Program: "*Goldy Goldenrod;*" **presented by Martha Burg.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**
- Feb 15** - Wed. - 6:30 p.m. **Evening Meeting** at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004), **Hosted by: Donna Fay Hilliard.** **Volunteer needed to assist her.** Program: "*To Comfort Always . . . Aromatherapy in Mainstream Medicine,*" **presented by Annie Wilson, RN.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

Newsletter deadline: 25th of every month

Submissions should be at most 1 page in Times New Roman 12

Member Concerns

Janice Teas – health concern for her husband and daughter, John and Amanda



**Rosemary for
Remembrance**

Sally Luna – passing of her husband, Dick Luna

Treasurer...Transitions

Janice Stuff has been appointed interim Treasurer for the South Texas Unit. Her appointment was made by Unit Chair, Sally Luna, and approved by the Board. Please submit your requests for reimbursements (with STU Form and Sales Receipts), or dues to

South Texas Unit Treasurer, P.O. Box 6515, Houston, TX 77265; or to Janice Stuff, 2112 South Blvd. Houston, TX 77098. Please contact Janice if you have any related questions at jestuff@pdq.net

Our previous Treasurer, **Lois Sutton**, resigned from the position and has relocated to Asheville, N.C. Lois served as Treasurer for 2 ½ terms (2011-2016) as well as an earlier term as Unit Treasurer. In addition to her extraordinary service as Treasurer, she contributed to the South Texas Unit in many related duties, programs and contributions. Thanks Lois!



Chairman's Corner



Happy New Year! And a great New Year it will be with a wonderful schedule of programs planned for both the day and the evening groups.

The South Texas Unit of the Herb Society of America had its traditional Yuletide party on the second Sunday of December at the home of Andy MacPhillimy and Lois Sutton with more than 30 members and guests attending. It was a spirited and joyous afternoon with exceptional food, conviviality and member's gift exchange. It was obvious that our members have become genuine friends and enjoy each other's varied backgrounds and accomplishments in addition to a mutual love of herb culture.

The MacPhillimy-Sutton home, decorated with their contemporary folk art collections of Christmas trees and Santa Clauses, was a festive setting. The day was, however, a bittersweet occasion because everyone realized that this was the last of many holiday parties at their home, since they would be moving at the end of the month to North Carolina. Lois, in her true selfless spirit, made the entrée, a scrumptious Beef, Mushroom and Cranberry Cobbler and members prepared their favorite holiday recipes.

The unit presented Lois and Andy with a terra cotta reindeer sculpture as a small token of the unit's appreciation for thirty-three years of generous service and contributions to the South Texas Unit of the Herb Society of America. Lois has held all the unit's board positions at least once and some twice. In addition she has always been the first person to volunteer when unassigned chores and problems arose. Heartfelt thanks to a great team!

Sally Luna
Unit Chair



Beef, Mushroom Cranberry Cobbler

(Served by Lois Sutton at the holiday party)

This is an easy recipe; it just has a lot of steps!
6 - 8 servings

2 Tbsp each olive oil & butter, divided
2 lbs beef stew meat (pot roast, boneless round or sirloin), trimmed & cut into 1-inch cubes
Salt & pepper to taste

12 oz. mushrooms, quartered or halved depending on size

1 onion cut into a large chop
2 cloves garlic, chopped

¾ cup each dry red wine and beef broth

2 – 3 Tbsp tarragon vinegar

1 – 2 Tbsp tomato paste

1 fresh bay leaf

1 tsp dried thyme

1 ½ cup chopped cranberries

1/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar

Corn starch

Pie crust for top (I used CostCo brand. If you make your own, it's good with whole wheat crust)

In a heavy 6-quart Dutch oven heat 1 Tbsp each butter & olive oil. Add half beef, season with salt & pepper and cook until well browned on all sides. Transfer to a holding-bowl. Repeat with remaining butter/oil & beef.

In oil remaining in pan sauté onions until soft & a little caramelized. Add to holding-bowl. Add a little oil to pan if needed and sauté mushrooms & garlic.

Return beef and onions to Dutch oven. Add ingredients wine through thyme. Bring to boil, cover pan, reduce heat and simmer until the meat is tender, 1 ½ - 2 hours. Turn off heat, let meat cool a bit and then scoop all solid ingredients back into that large holding-bowl. Add cranberries, brown sugar & 2 – 3 Tbsp of corn starch. Mix well. Remove the bay leaf if you happen to spot it!

Heat beef broth to boil; reduce it by about 1/3. Then add corn starch-water slurry to thicken the liquid – not quite as thick as stand-alone gravy would be.

Preheat oven to 350. Put beef mixture into casserole dish. Pour some of the gravy over the beef mixture, probably not all. Place crust on top of the beef mixture, making sure you bring crust all the way to the edge of the pan. Cut slits in crust. Brush crust with an egg wash (1 egg- 1 Tbsp water well blended) for great color. Bake 20 – 25 minutes, until crust is golden brown. Serve from the casserole.



What's Coming?



OLD TRADITIONS FOR A NEW YEAR
by Karen Cottingham

The profusion of rituals for ringing in the New Year is testimony to the richness of the human imagination. Perhaps you waved your champagne flute in the air as you counted down the seconds for the crystal ball to descend in Times Square. Or maybe you ran around your yard with sparklers and noisemakers. You might even have shared a joyful kiss with a loved one. Then, hopefully being pragmatic, you secured your good luck and fortune for the New Year by eating greens and black eyed peas.

German revelers might have engaged in molybdomancy, a technique of divination using molten metal. According to practitioners of this "art", one's fortune is revealed by the shape the metal assumes when dropped into cold water. Italian men traditionally wear red underwear (look up the reason for yourself - this is a *family* newsletter!). And in the Philippines, wearing colorful clothes with circular patterns such as polka dots is supposed to attract money and good fortune.

It is only fitting that the first evening program of our 2017 HSA-STU schedule should teach us something new about New Year traditions. The January 18, 2017 presentation, *Henna Artistry - Ephemeral Yet Enduring; Enduring Yet Ephemeral*, will explore henna from its ancient roots to its modern revival. In many cultures, henna is indispensable for safely ushering in the New Year.

According to Noam Sienna, writing on the research blog *Eshkol hakofer*, the January New Year celebrated by a few North African groups "... was a time to start things off on the right foot, and thus auspicious behaviour (like leaping over a fire, putting on new clothes, eating symbolic food, and writing charms) was encouraged. It was also a dangerous time when spirits were afoot and sorcery could have extra powerful effects; thus the act of applying henna and kohl, with its *baraka* (blessing) and protective qualities, fit right in as a proper activity."

Henna is also a traditional part of the festivities for *Nowruz*, the more commonly celebrated Persian New Year observed at the Spring Equinox. Members of the ethnic and religious groups that celebrate *Nowruz* still have their hands, feet, beards, and hair hennaed for the occasion. In Shiraz, Iran, even the manes and tails of horses, donkeys, and mules were hennaed for the New Year until just a few decades ago. Charming old photographs show that some animals sported festive henna polka-dots over their entire bodies.

To find out more about the fascinating history of henna, please read the article *A NIGHT OF HENNA* in the December 2016 HSA-STU *HERBS MAKE SCENTS* newsletter. And don't miss the January 18th evening meeting, *Henna Artistry - Ephemeral Yet Enduring; Enduring Yet Ephemeral*. We'll meet at the beautiful **CHERIE FLORES GARDEN PAVILION** at 1500 Hermann Drive. The entrance to the Pavilion's parking lot is where Crawford Street T-intersects with Hermann Drive. Herb Society members gather at 6:15 pm. The free, public program begins at 7:15 pm.



Dear Fellow South Texas Unit members,

We're so glad that so many of you were able to come to the unit holiday gathering (We do dress up well, don't we!) I think the house was left happier being so full of cheer, laughter and good food. (The growing piles of packed boxes have been a little sad to the memories dancing around the rooms.)

We have named the Mexican reindeer, Gus – not very Texan or Houstonian – but it seemed to fit. I'm thinking he'll wear a Texas Hog bandana when he is dressed for public in our new home! Thank you for such a fabulous addition to the reindeer collection. He will always bring a smile to our faces and give us fodder for stories about all of you to share with guests in the new Asheville house!

Thank You!
Love, Lois and Andy



PINE DINING by Karen Cottingham

Imagine it is 1974 and you are watching your black-and-white television. Famed naturalist Euell Gibbons appears on the screen as the quirky spokesman for Grape Nuts breakfast cereal. To capture your attention, he starts out by asking the seemingly ridiculous question, “Ever eat a pine tree?” He then continues with, “Many parts are edible!” Gibbons wasn’t just a famous naturalist and forager. He was a lovable oddball whose natural lifestyle and commercials for Grape Nuts were immortalized in hilarious spoofs by Carol Burnett, Johnny Carson, Dean Martin, Sonny & Cher, and even high school skits that humorously poked fun at natural foods. And Gibbons was right about the nutritional possibilities in a pine tree.

In some cultures, dietary practices based on pine played an important role in spirituality as well as in sustenance. For Taoists in ancient China who were seeking immortality, an ascetic diet of pine needles, pine resin and pine cones prepared their bodies for transcendence.

Closer to home, Native Americans chewed pine resin as a natural chewing gum and brewed pine needle tea to treat the effects of what we now know as Vitamin C deficiency. Pine nuts were an important source of fats and protein for many tribes and even the inner bark of the pine tree could be eaten in times of desperation. Native American men also knew to consume pine pollen, which is rich in a testosterone-like substance, to prepare for physically demanding activities.

Inspired by Mark “Merriwether” Vorderbruggen’s recent program on Foraging at our November HSA-STU evening meeting, I decided to add some foraged plants to my meals. Considering the abundance of pine trees in the area, pine needle cookery seemed like the logical place to start.

Pine needle tea, or more appropriately a “tisane” or “infusion”, is as simple as it gets. Roughly chop some fresh needles and place them in a cup. Add

boiling water and cover the cup to prevent the volatile components from escaping. When the needles lose their bright color and sink to the bottom of the cup, your brew is ready!

Not surprisingly, the flavor of pine needle tea is resinous and woody, but it can also have a hint of citrus. Today, the novelty value of preparing pine needle tea probably exceeds the flavor and nutritional value; but historically, pine needle tea has been a ready source of Vitamin C. I can see why there is a strong tradition of drinking pine needle infusions to maintain health not only among Native Americans, but in northern Europe and the Far East as well.



My next foray into pine needle cuisine was amazing pine needle syrup enhanced with nutmeg, cinnamon, and clove. Only my very best friend received a bottle of this elixir for Christmas - the rest I have hoarded away to sweeten tea, coffee, lemonade, and herbal beverages based on lemongrass or lemon balm. I can also imagine pine needle bread pudding, rice pudding, and custard. It’s a good thing there is no shortage of pine needles here!

Pine needle syrup is not only a wonderful and uniquely flavored sweetener, but it also has decongestant, antiseptic, and expectorant properties for those with winter coughs and colds.

For those of you who would like to make your own conifer syrup, I used the recipe on the website “Local Milk - The Art of Slow Living”. I am already planning to “branch out” to other conifers on my next trip to Washington state and try spruce tips, Douglas fir, Western hemlock,

and redwood. I’ve read that they all have a unique flavor profile, and even individual trees can vary greatly in their flavor.

The holiday season inspired me to focus my pine needle culinary experiments in a festive direction; so I brought pine needle cookies to a New Year’s Eve Party! The general consensus was that the pine needles I used were not very strongly flavored.



In the best version of the sugar cookies I used about three times the recommended amount of pine needles and then sprinkled some on top for decoration and good measure. They were beautiful and delicious, but only mildly piney. Further experimentation with another recipe resulted in a shortbread cookie that is so wonderful that it was even worth the effort of rolling out the dough and getting out the cookie cutters. See the recipe for Evergreen and Sea Salt Shortbread Cookies on The Tea Cup Chronicles website if you've been "pining" for your family to think you're awesome!

While I'm recommending websites, you might also enjoy a blog from the NPR Science Desk called The Salt. The January 19, 2014 broadcast, "Cooking with Conifers: An Evergreen Trick That's Newly Hip", features adventurous restaurateurs whose pricey and imaginative menu items include conifers and other foraged foods.

There are many flavors yet to extract from conifers. I plan to really "go out on a limb" and experiment with conifer-based herb blends and brines, pine flavored vinegars and oils, and cakes, cookies, breads, and honeys enhanced with various conifers. Some people even incorporate conifer needles in their home-brewed beer and spirits.

Thank you to Mark Vorderbruggen for his inspiring introduction to foraging. Pine needle culinary exploration was a great opportunity to "branch out" and try something new. Maybe I'll try cattails next - mentioned by Mark in his talk and another one of Euell Gibbons's favorites!

In closing, there is an important safety consideration to impart: Some experts recommend that pine needle consumption may not be safe for pregnant women.



Herb Society of America Musings....

Take a look at the latest HERBARIST...It came with the onslaught of holiday mail and is well worth a read. The opening quote is a winner. *"What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have never been discovered."* - Ralph Waldo Emerson

This a comforting thought as the new crop of weeds are poking up in our garden!

There is a great essay with recipes on Switchels and Shrubs. You will recall that our program chair, Karen Cottingham and new member, Andi Leger, offered Switchel as an aperitif before one of the fall meetings.

Be sure to check out Lois Sutton's article on Bloodroot.

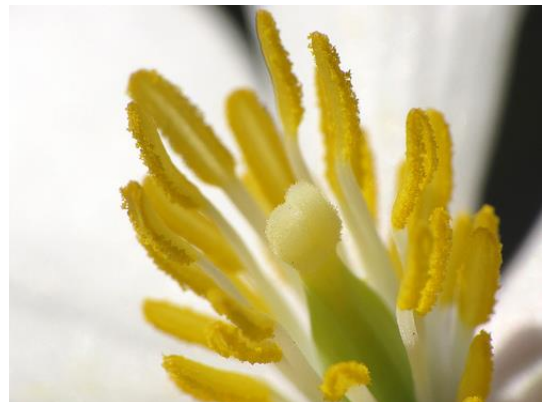


Figure 1 Bloodroot: Up real close!

The South Texas Unit is a non-profit educational organization incorporated under the State of Texas. The South Texas Unit has no paid employees. Our activities are accomplished through the efforts of our volunteers.

The Herb Society of America
South Texas Unit
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The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research and sharing the knowledge of its members with the community.



Find our Unit on the web at:
www.herbsociety-stu.org